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INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00
	EB-00	FBIE-00	VC-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00
	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-02
	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00
	SP-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00
	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/009W		

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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8321
INFO ASEAN COLLECTIVE
SECDEF WASHDC
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 002951

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL 12/11/2012
TAGS: PHUM PGOV KIRF VM HUMANR RELFREE
SUBJECT: LEADING JESUIT ASSESSES CHURCH/STATE RELATIONS

REF: HCMC 963

11. (U) CLASSIFIED BY CG EMI YAMAUCHI; REASON 1.5(D).

12. (C) SUMMARY. CONSUL GENERAL AND POLOFF RECENTLY MET
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WITH FATHER TOAN, FATHER SUPERIOR OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS,
TO DISCUSS HIS VIEWS ON THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CATHOLIC
CHURCH IN VIETNAM. HIS COMMENTS ON COOPERATION WITH THE
GVN CONFIRMED WHAT POST HAS UNDERSTOOD FOR SOME TIME: THAT
A DELIBERATE, NON-CONFRONTATIONAL APPROACH HAS LED TO
GREATER FREEDOMS FOR THE CHURCH AND ITS FOLLOWERS. AT THE
SAME TIME, HE DID NOT DISCOUNT THE SERIOUS CHALLENGES
REMAINING. HIS THOUGHTFUL OBSERVATIONS ON FATHER LY
CONFIRMED THAT A LESS THAN EXEMPLARY PERSONAL AND
PROFESSIONAL RECORD AS A PRIEST HAD MADE IT DIFFICULT FOR
THE CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP TO SUPPORT HIS CAUSE. END SUMMARY.

13. (C) FATHER TOAN -- WHO SPEAKS EXCELLENT ENGLISH - WAS
THE ONLY OTHER CHURCH OFFICIAL PRESENT DURING A COURTESY
CALL ON HO CHI MINH CITY (HCMC) ARCHBISHOP MAN IN OCTOBER.
A SMALL DINNER ORGANIZED BY A LOCAL BUSINESSMAN WAS THE
OCCASION FOR A MORE INFORMAL DISCUSSION ON MATTERS
RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR. FATHER TOAN IS A SELF-DESCRIBED "B-
54", A NORTHERN CATHOLIC WHO CAME SOUTH DURING THE 1954
PARTITION OF VIETNAM. AS FATHER SUPERIOR, HE IS NOT ONLY
RESPONSIBLE FOR ADMINISTERING THE JESUIT ORDER, BUT ALSO
PERSONALLY DRAFTS MUCH OF THE ARCHBISHOP'S PUBLIC AND
PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE. HOWEVER, HE WOULD ONLY GO SO FAR
AS TO CONFIRM THAT HE "UNDERSTOOD" THERE HAD BEEN A LETTER
FROM THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS TO THE GVN REGARDING HARSH
TREATMENT OF UNREGISTERED PROTESTANT HOUSE CHURCHES IN THE
CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AND NORTHWEST VIETNAM. HE WOULD NOT BE
DRAWN IN TO A DISCUSSION ABOUT WHETHER IT WAS BETTER TO
REGISTER WITH THE GVN OR NOT, BUT NOTED THAT THE
PROTESTANTS WERE HAVING A MORE DIFFICULT TIME IN THE
CENTRAL HIGHLANDS THAN THE CATHOLICS.

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14. (C) FATHER TOAN HIMSELF SPENT NINE YEARS IN PRISON
DURING THE 1980S AND EARLY 1990S FOR ACTIVITIES THE GVN
VIEWED AS ASSERTING THE INDEPENDENCE AND SPIRITUAL
SUPREMACY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN VIETNAM. WHILE HIS
TREATMENT ALTERNATED BETWEEN HUMANE AND HARSH, HE BELIEVED
HE LEARNED A GREAT DEAL ABOUT GVN "PSYCHOLOGY" DURING THE
INTERROGATIONS. IN FATHER TOAN'S OPINION, HIS GUARDS SPOKE
MORE CANDIDLY WITH HIM IN PRISON. IN FACT, HE SAID THAT
ONE GUARD, WHO HAD OFTEN ASKED HIM FOR PERSONAL ADVICE,
YEARS LATER WROTE HIM A LETTER FROM HIS DEATHBED. THE
PERSON TO WHOM THE LETTER WAS ENTRUSTED SUBSEQUENTLY
DESTROYED THE LETTER WITHOUT DELIVERING IT TO FATHER TOAN.
THIS SECOND INDIVIDUAL LATER CONTACTED FATHER TOAN TO
APOLOGIZE, BUT SAID HE WAS AFRAID OF WHAT THE LETTER
CONTAINED. WHILE HE WOULD/COULD NOT TELL HIM ITS CONTENTS.
FATHER TOAN BELIEVED THE LETTER ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE GUARD
HIMSELF HAD BEEN A SILENT BELIEVER ALL THOSE YEARS AND
WANTED FORGIVENESS IN THE END.

15. (C) FATHER TOAN NOTED THAT HE CAME TO SAIGON FROM NHA
TRANG SHORTLY BEFORE THE CITY FELL TO COMMUNIST FORCES IN

APRIL 1975, JUST IN TIME TO WORK AS AN ASSISTANT TO THE RECENTLY DECEASED CARDINAL THUAN (SEE REFTEL). WHEN ASKED ABOUT ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE FUNERAL MASS HELD ON SEPTEMBER 20 IN NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL IN CENTRAL HCMC, HE CONFIRMED THAT THE LARGE CROWD HAD ASSEMBLED SIMPLY BY WORD OF MOUTH AND BY THE BANNER HANGING OVER THE CHURCH'S ARCHWAY. HE FURTHER RELATED THAT THE ARCHBISHOP HAD BEEN IN CONTACT WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES ABOUT A PUBLIC MEMORIAL SERVICE LONG BEFORE THE CARDINAL'S DEATH. FATHER TOAN ATTRIBUTED THE

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CHURCH'S ABILITY TO HOST AN OPENLY EMOTIONAL MASS FOR A CONTROVERSIAL PRIEST WHO HAD NEVER RETURNED TO VIETNAM AFTER LEAVING THE COUNTRY IN 1991, TO ITS COOPERATIVE, "NO SURPRISES" APPROACH TO THE GVN.

16. (C) FATHER TOAN REMEMBERED RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GVN AND THE CHURCH IN THE YEARS IMMEDIATELY AFTER REUNIFICATION AS INITIALLY CORDIAL. THOSE RELATIONS DRAMATICALLY WORSENER IN THE EARLY 1980S, WHEN THE GVN BEGAN TO FEAR ROME'S INFLUENCE -- PARTICULARLY THAT OF THE JESUITS. THEN CAME FATHER TOAN'S NINE YEARS OF IMPRISONMENT. EMERGING FROM PRISON IN THE EARLY 1990S, HE RESUMED HIS DUTIES WITH THE ORDER, ALTHOUGH IN A MUCH LESS VISIBLE MANNER. HE HAD TO WORK HIS WAY UP THE RANKS AGAIN. AFFIRMING WHAT OTHER CHURCH LEADERS HAVE SAID BEFORE, FATHER TOAN ACKNOWLEDGED THAT LOW-KEY, COOPERATIVE DIALOGUE WITH THE GVN HAD BEEN MORE PRODUCTIVE THAN CONFRONTATION. HE GENERALLY FOUND PARTY LEADERS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS LESS STRIDENT WHEN HE CALLED ON THEM AT HOME, RATHER THAN IN THEIR OFFICES. HE BELIEVED THEY WERE WILLING TO MAKE REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS, AS LONG AS THE CHURCH DID NOT PUBLICLY BOAST OF THEM.

17. (C) IN THIS WAY, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAD BEEN ABLE TO

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MAKE NOTICEABLE STRIDES OVER THE PAST TEN YEARS. ONE MAJOR CHANGE WAS THE ABILITY OF PRIESTS TO TRAVEL FREELY OUTSIDE VIETNAM. INSTEAD OF ASKING FOR PERMISSION, AS WAS REQUIRED IN THE PAST, PRIESTS TODAY ONLY NEEDED TO NOTIFY THE GOVERNMENT OF THEIR TRAVEL PLANS. FATHER TOAN HAS TRAVELED

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EXTENSIVELY IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA SINCE HIS RELEASE. HE ALSO NOTED THE GOVERNMENT'S WILLINGNESS TO TURN A BLIND EYE TO THE TRAINING AND ASSIGNMENT OF NUNS. ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT USE THE WORD "SEXIST," HE ACKNOWLEDGED THIS WAS BECAUSE THE GVN FOUND "WOMEN LESS THREATENING THAN MEN IN TERMS OF HAVING A POLITICAL AGENDA OR STRENGTH."

18. (C) DESPITE THE PROGRESS MADE SO FAR, FATHER TOAN NOTED SERIOUS LIMITATIONS ON THE CHURCH'S ABILITY TO TRAIN ADEQUATE NUMBERS OF SEMINARIANS AND ORDAIN THEM AS PRIESTS. HE EXPRESSED DOUBT THAT THE LONG-AWAITED SEVENTH SEMINARY -- TO BE LOCATED IN NEIGHBORING DONG NAI PROVINCE -- WOULD BE ALLOWED TO OPEN IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. HE BELIEVED THE GREATEST CHALLENGE STILL FACING THE CHURCH WAS THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTINUING FEAR OF A SPIRITUAL RIVAL TO THE COMMUNIST PARTY.

19. (C) ASKED FOR HIS OPINION OF FATHER NGUYEN VAN LY, SENTENCED TO 15 YEARS IN PRISON FOR ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES, FATHER TOAN AGAIN CONFIRMED WHAT OTHER SOURCES HAVE SAID BEFORE. WHILE HE INITIALLY HEDGED HIS ANSWER BY NOTING THAT HE SPENT LITTLE TIME IN HUE AND HAD NOT COME INTO CONTACT WITH HIM OFTEN, HE EVENTUALLY ADMITTED THAT

FATHER LY WAS NOT WELL RESPECTED BY OTHERS IN THE CHURCH.
FATHER TOAN ALSO CRITICIZED FATHER LY FOR GETTING INVOLVED
IN CONTROVERSIAL ACTIVITIES WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS
BISHOP. THIS, HE BELIEVED, WAS THE MAJOR REASON THE CHURCH
HAD NOT UNITED MORE FORCEFULLY BEHIND HIM.

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